

INL collaborates with ISU on ESTEC project

Pocatello-Feb. 2, the vision and plans, along with the partners involved in the development of the Energy Systems Technology and Education Center on the Idaho State University Campus were unveiled at a press conference. Congressman Mike Simpson, the Governor's Educational Liaison Karen McGee, and Idaho State University President Arthur C. Vailas, in conjunction with other state, business and government leaders, elaborated on the impact to economic development, education, and employment and the national need to repopulate a shrinking energy sector work force.

In December, the U.S. Department of Labor announced Idaho State University's College of Technology as one of 72 recipients receiving a President's Community Based Job Training Grant. The event on Feb. 2 is the beginning of the implementation phase. As a result, the University will receive \$1,996,958 to be used in the development of the Energy Systems Technology and Education Center (ESTEC). Idaho State University, Idaho National Laboratory and Partners for Prosperity are working collaboratively in this effort.

The Energy Systems and Technology Education Center has three major components: education and work force development, economic development and community development. ESTEC is intended to help offset the growing national shortage of energy systems technicians and is expected to facilitate regional economic competitiveness, increased job growth and provide new opportunities for all employees.

"Yes, it is true, we will have a K-12 program that will enlighten our children as to the impact of energy in their lives and to provide our young adults with information concerning energy careers. We will reach out through Partners for Prosperity to the unemployed, the underemployed and the underserved populations in our communities," stated Richard Holman, technical advisor to the associate lab director for Nuclear Operations at INL, "And, too, we will develop and deliver three accredited engineering technology associate degrees in electrical, mechanical and instrumentation and control disciplines. To cap it all off, we will establish an industrial research capability intended to sustain the Center long after the grant monies run out."

The Center will provide a collaborative environment for ISU, INL and industry partners to conduct applied industrial research on next generation electrical components and systems. "Through this Center, we have the opportunity to knit the global energy challenge into the fabric of the educational and research missions of Idaho State University," Holman said. This unique collaboration between education and industry will sustain the Center, he added.

Simpson said, "It is clear this will go beyond the three-year grant-funding cycle, and resources developed through ISU will provide opportunities for students here and around the nation".

Karen McGee, Educational Policy Advisory for Gov. Otter, said, "This grant will provide scholarships and opportunities for students to earn college credits while in high school. This is a wonderful opportunity for southeast Idaho." The Center will help promote math and science studies to high school and grade school students to ready them for technical and engineering programs at ISU.

ISU President Arthur Vailas said, "The entire nation is looking on this place and it will have a sustainable and worldwide impact."

Scott Rasmussen, Electronics Department chair and primary investigator of the grant, added, "We will prepare Engineering Technicians that will graduate from this Center prepared to enjoy lifelong careers in an exploding energy generation industry."

ESTEC will offer an associate degree in Energy Systems Instrumentation and Control Engineering Technology beginning this fall. Associate degrees in Energy Systems Electrical Engineering Technology and Energy Systems Mechanical Engineering Technology will follow in the fall of 2008 and 2009 respectively. Scholarships will be available for the Fall 2007 program offering. Dr. Andy Klein, INL director of Education, Training and Research Partnerships, said, "The Center will provide highly trained, highly educated and well-paid people. We are interested in hiring many of the future graduates of the Center."

The Blackfoot-based nonprofit group Partners for Prosperity played a key role in the community-based aspect by developing partnerships with educational and economic development programs, veterans, Shoshone-Bannock tribal members and migrant workers. Region 5 Tech Prep in Idaho will work to advance the opportunities for K-12 students to be introduced to energy systems concepts and careers.

Multiple organizations pledged financial and technical support for the Center including; Entergy, Idaho Power, INL, Partners for Prosperity, NIDA Corporation (makers of state-of-the-art electronics training simulators), the Regional Coordinating Council (a coalition of Eastern Idaho economic development organizations), Idaho Tech Prep Program, Idaho Migrant Council, Shoshone-Bannock Tribe, Idaho Department of Commerce and Labor, Idaho State Department of Education Office of Adult Education, Centers for New Directions at both Eastern Idaho Technical College and Idaho State University, Idaho State University TRIO Program (working with "at-risk" student populations), Central Virginia Community College (K-12 program and technical curriculum development), Idaho School District 25 Gateway Academies, IGNITE (Inspiring Girls Now in Technology Evolution) and Tech Connect East. Letters of support were also received from AREVA, Eastern Idaho Community Action Partnership (supporting at-risk populations in preparing for post-secondary studies), and the Idaho Falls Community Outreach Center.

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Photo: Students study brain

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Photo: Dr. Andy Klein

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